

14 Vital Skills for Supervisors

Managing Unfit-for-Duty Employees



13



Managing Unfit-for- Duty Employees

Your top priority is protecting employees and providing a safe workplace.

Drug or Alcohol Abuse

Skill
13

- Out-of-control behavior of drug or alcohol abusers may endanger you and your staff
- It's your responsibility to identify such behavior quickly and address it decisively
- Follow your organization's fitness for duty policy and its procedures



Handling Unfit Workers


Skill
13

- First priority is to prevent harm to the employee and others
- Enlist another manager to help you approach the employee; never take action alone
- This reduces physical danger and you gain the benefit of having a reliable witness in case of litigation



Handling Unfit Workers (continued)


Skill
13

- Guide the employee to a private office or workspace, away from other workers, customers and potentially harmful equipment or machinery 
- Gently encourage the employee to accompany you and your colleague; don't grab the person's hand or otherwise risk antagonizing him or her



Handling Unfit Workers (continued)

Skill
13

- Refer to documented or observed behaviors and seek an explanation (with your colleague taking notes)
- If the employee admits  to substance abuse, focus on support and accommodation
- Never let an employee drive who does not appear to be in control of their behavior



If Employee is in Denial



Skill
13

- You face a delicate balancing act
- You don't want to argue and trigger a belligerent situation
- Don't try to prevent the employee from leaving the room 📢



If Employee is in Denial (continued)

Skill
13

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- BUT you don't want to disregard the seriousness of the situation and allow the person to drive or return to work
 - After consulting your company policy and your HR manager, you may decide that the safest course of action is
 - Conduct a drug test
 - Drive the employee home
 - Impose a conditional suspension
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If Employee is in Denial (continued)


Skill
13

- If an employee will not accept a ride home from you:
 - Arrange for another coworker to drive, or
 - Contact a family member to pick up the employee, or
 - Call a taxi and prepay the driver, or
 - Call the local police and alert them of the situation



Document Events as they Unfold

Skill
13

- If someone informs you that the employee is unfit for duty, ask the reporting employee to describe the incident in writing
 - Discuss it promptly with the employee  the employee acted out
 - Ask the employee to read, sign and date the write-up to confirm its accuracy—or submit a signed, written rebuttal with an alternate account of what happened



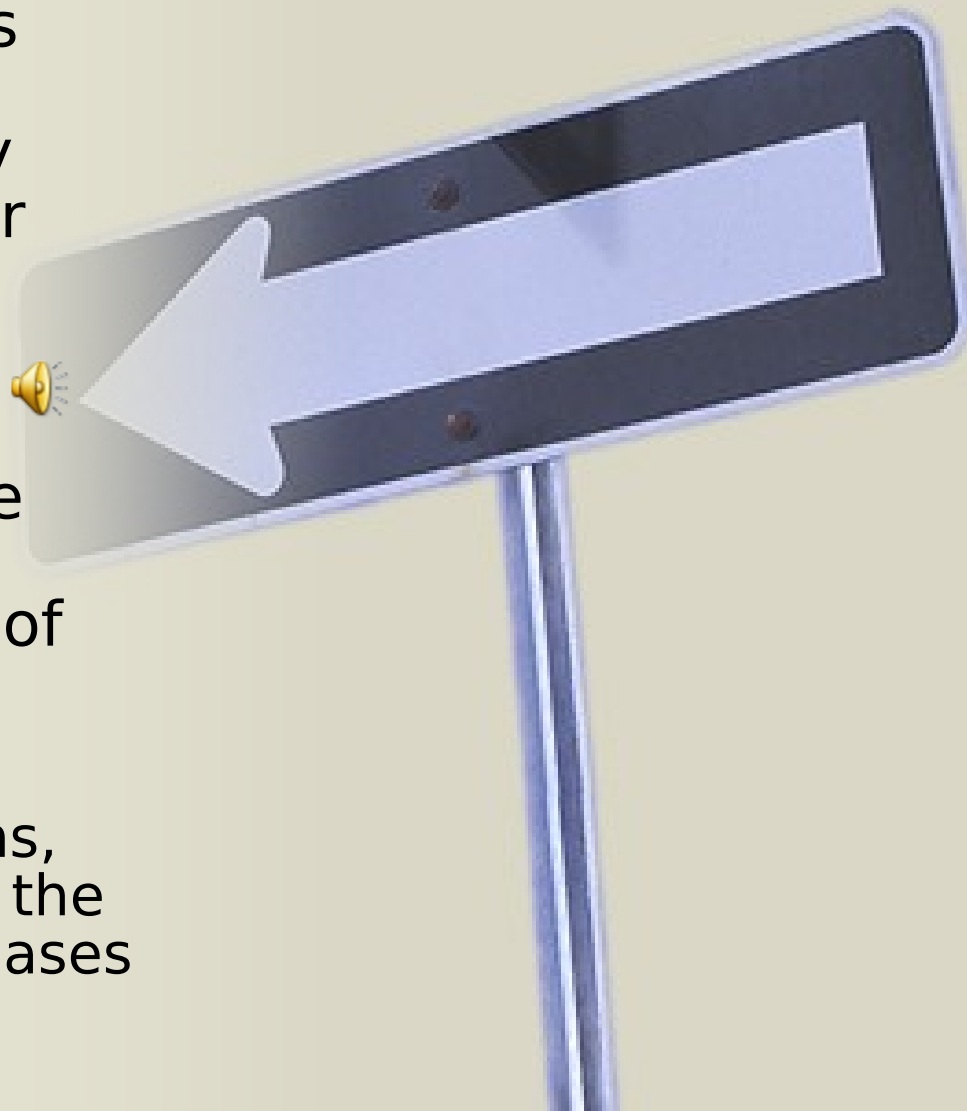
Warning

Skill
13

- Follow up on all reports of inappropriate employee behavior
- Ignoring warning signs, from reports of employees making verbal threats to requests by coworkers to move their work locations away from “depressed” or “unstable” employees, can expose you to greater problems down the line




- Encourage employees to report coworkers whose behavior appears potentially dangerous or under the influence of alcohol or other drugs
- Employees hesitate to report their suspicions for fear of getting involved or causing trouble
 - When this happens, risk to others and the organization increases



It's True

Skill 13

- Employees may not be fit for full duty when they return following sick leave
- Doctors may not understand “all duties and essential functions”
- Unfit-for-duty employees risk further injury to self or others
- Verify fitness with a medical doctor's certification 
 - Provide the job description and its physical requirements to the physician, or
 - Have the employee's doctor complete a “functional capacities form”
 - Use it to judge ability to perform full duties safely or what modifications or light duty work is necessary.

